

Message Text

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TO USINT BAGHDAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 049199

FOLLOWING REPEAT ADDIS ABABA 2446 ACTION SECSTATE INFO
ASMARA BEIRUT CAIRO DAMASCUS KHARTOUM JIDDA SANAA 28 FEBRUARY.

QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 2446

DEPT PASS USINT BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, ET

SUBJECT: MICHAEL IMRU'S COMMENT ON THE ERITREAN
PROBLEM

1. MINISTER OF INFORMATION MICHAEL IMRU TOLD CHARGE
FEBRUARY 28 THAT THE EPMG HAS NOT "SHUT THE DOOR" ON
NIMEIRI'S MEDICATION PROPOSAL REGARDING THE ERITREAN
HOSTILITIES. MICHAEL SAID THE PREVAILING REACTION IN
THE DIRG WHEN NIMEIRI'S PROPOSAL ARRIVED WAS THAT
ACCEPTANCE BY THE EPMG WOULD BE READ AS A SIGN OF
WEAKNESS AND WOULD THEREFORE ENCOURAGE THE INSURGENTS
AND THEIR ARAB BACKER STATES. THE DIRG HAD ALSO
CONSIDERED THAT A CEASE-FIRE AT THAT PARTICULAR TIME
WOULD HAVE BEEN ADVANTAGEOUS FOR THE INSURGENTS. THE
DIRG THOUGHT IT COULD IMPROVE THE SITUATION BY TAKING
MILITARY AND OTHER MEASURES WHICH WOULD IMPRESS ALL
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CONCERNED WITH ITS DETERMINATION TO PRESERVE ETHIOPIA'S UNITY.

MICHAEL SAID THAT HE AND OTHERS ARE NOW URGING THAT IT IS TIME TO REPLY TO NIMEIRI'S INITIATIVE AND ATTEMPT TO BEGIN MEANINGFUL NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE REBELS. HE BELIEVES THAT THEY WILL BE SUCCESSFUL SOONER OR LATER BECAUSE THE FIRG HAS CONSIDERED THAT NEGOTIATIONS SHOULD FOLLOW AN INITIAL MILITARY DEMONSTRATION. MICHAEL ALSO COMMENTED THAT NIMEIRI'S PROPOSAL WOULD HAVE HAD BETTER CHANCES HERE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING IF IT HAD BEEN CONVEYED PRIVATELY RATHER THAN PUBLICLY.

2. MICHAEL IMRU SPOKE AT SOME LENGTH REGARDING HIS MISSION'S RECENT TOUR OF ARAB CAPITALS TO INFLUENCE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ERITREAN INSURGENCY. HE SAID THE MISSION HAD CONSISTENTLY SOUNDED THE MAJOR THEME THAT ETHIOPIA HAS STRONGLY SUPPORTED THE ARAB STATES SINCE ITS BREAK WITH ISRAEL AND THAT A CONTINUING FAILURE OF THE ARAB STATES TO RECIPROCATATE IN RELATION TO ERITREA WILL CREATE REAL PROBLEMS IN BILATERAL RELATIONS. MICHAEL'S REMARKS DID NOT SUGGEST THAT HE FELT GREAT PROGRESS HAD BEEN MADE AS A RESULT OF HIS TOUR. HE SAID THAT SYRIAN AND IRAQI OFFICIALS HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN "BRAINWASHED" BY THE INSURGENTS, THAT THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN QUITE FRIENDLY, AND THAT PRESIDENT SADAT HAD COUNSELLED THE EPMG NOT TO UNDERRATE AND DESTROY INITIATIVE AND PRIVATE ENTERPRISE IN ITS SOCIALIST SOCIETY. MICHAEL CAME TO THE CONCLUSION ON THE BASIS OF HIS TRIP THAT THE BASIC REASON FOR THE INTEREST OF THE ARAB STATES IN THE ERITREAN PROBLEM IS THEIR DESIRE TO MONOPOLIZE THE ENTIRE RED SEA LITTORAL. HE BELIEVES THEY HAVE LITTLE IF ANY INTEREST IN ERITREA WHICH GOES FURTHER THAN "PERHAPS 30 KILOMETERS FROM THE COASTLINE."

3. IN REVIEWING EVENTS IN ERITREA IN RECENT MONTHS, MICHAEL IMRU EXPRESSED HIS CONVICTION THAT THE PROSPECTS FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS HAD BEEN RELATIVELY GOOD UNTIL THE KILLING OF GENERAL AMAN DESTROYED MUCH OF THE CONFIDENCE OF THE INSURGENTS AND INFLUENCED SOME OF THEM TO TURN TOWARDS TACTICS OF TERRIRISM AT A TIME WHEN ETHIOPIAN MILITARY UNITS

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STILL HAD INSTRUCTIONS TO STAY IN THEIR BARRACKS. THE TERRORIST TACTICS IN TURN HAD INFURIATED THE MILITARY AND CREATED THE POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE SITUATION WHICH THEN BLEW UP ON JANUARY 31.

4. COMMENT. MICHAEL IS A NOTABLY STRAIGHTFORWARD AND PRO-WESTERN INDIVIDUAL IN THE CERACITY OF WHOSE STATEMENTS WE HAVE CONSIDERABLE CONFIDENCE, THOUGH HE

IS SOMETIMES TOO OPTIMISTIC.
WYMAN UNQUOTE INGERSOLL

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